

Dr. George Kain, Police Commissioner Ridgefield

In Support of SB 280 to repeal the death penalty

My name is Dr. George Kain. I am an Associate Professor in the Division of Justice and Law Administration at Western Connecticut State University. Prior to my teaching at Western CT, I was a CT Adult Probation Officer and a Judicial Branch administrator for 12 years. I am currently a Police Commissioner in the Town of Ridgefield, and have been for 13 years.

My personal view of the death penalty has changed significantly over the years, and I have come to find through discussing this issue with my Law Enforcement (LE) colleagues that many of them share the exact same concerns that I have, and they too support abolition.

Recent debate in opposition to the death penalty has focused on wrongful conviction and on the risk of innocent people being put to death- these are certainly strong, valid arguments. Wrongful convictions for any offense are a black eye for all of us in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) because our credibility suffers- and has suffered- as a result.

One of the main concerns shared by many of my law enforcement colleagues focuses on the economic side of this debate. Not only are precious financial resources wasted on a death penalty process which leads to a punishment infrequently applied and even less frequently carried out- but the death penalty also takes away time and resources from the effective prevention and intervention programs that we know work in our law enforcement efforts.

Additionally, the millions of dollars that we could divert to these effective programs could also be used to provide additional training for our LE officers and for increased victim services; two areas in our CJS that we know could use strengthening. We need to do more for surviving family members of violent crime, and we can do more. In fact, it was the focus on increased funding for officer training as well as for increased funding for victim services that led the Illinois legislature to pass their anti-death penalty bill last year.

Two weeks ago, we heard from 179 surviving family members who were victims of murder in their families, and who made it strikingly clear that the entirety of the capital punishment process did not bring them any closure concerning the loss of their loved ones and that time only exacerbated the pain that they felt. There is an ever-growing body of evidence that testifies to this reality. Additionally, those murder cases not chosen for capital punishment cause more distress to those who are victims because it creates two categories of murders: those that are "the worst" and those "not as bad". How can we continue to do this?

My fear is that, given our current financial crisis, not only will we continue to waste money on a punishment that isn't cost effective; we could continue to see further reductions in our LE workforce that have actually already begun through recent layoffs of police officers, and also have less money available for victim services. I don't have to wave a flag of concern over the validity of these issues; they are clearly before us for all to see.

If we knew that the Death Penalty worked, we'd be having a totally different discussion right now, but in the 36 years since it's reinstatement in the country in 1976, we have seen again and again that it doesn't work, and further, that we don't need it. In the words of former US Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun, "the death penalty experiment has failed". Law enforcement doesn't need the death penalty, the State of CT doesn't need the DP, and our country doesn't need the death penalty. The death penalty has failed all of us. CT can join the other states in this great country that are currently abolishing the capital punishment. You can make that happen this legislative term and I hope that you will.

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